

# Coding Your Outlook Calendar

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## Purpose

If you have ever found yourself saying, “*where did the time go?*”, you’re not alone!

This exercise is a short-term investment in your personal productivity. We start by reviewing our calendar activities, and creating high-level categories to assign to each entry. This is the first of two steps that will help you understand how your time is actually being spent. The colour-coded entries will show you where you are spending your time, versus where you perceive your time is being spent. This will prepare you for the [calendar audit](#) which will allow you to assess if your time is spent according to your priorities and to understand where adjustments can be made, if needed. The end goal will be to find ways to do our work better, more efficiently, and sustainably.

### Strengthen your skills in:

- Microsoft Outlook
- Time management
- Data collection
- Productivity
- Microsoft Excel (optional)

## How to Prepare

Your calendar is your personal data gold mine. The objective for this short exercise is to gather as much information as possible about the current state of your workday. Track the scheduled and unscheduled tasks – for example, administrative work, reviewing and approving documents, interruptions and unplanned priorities.

As you engage with this exercise, do your best to ensure that each of your calendar entries meets the criteria below:

1. **Track exactly how your time is being spent.** These time blocks should reflect all of your daily activities (scheduled and unscheduled);
2. **Reflects the reality of your day, instead of how it was planned.** This might mean taking a minute to update your entries after the fact;
3. **Assign each entry a category.** This is important for the calendar audit portion of the exercise.

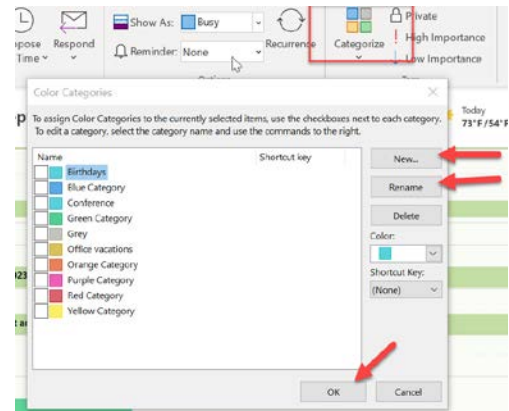
If you are satisfied with your calendar entries, and have assigned each one a category, you can move to the next step: the [calendar audit](#)! If not, please continue the exercise by following the steps below.

## Step 1: Determine Your Sample Size (Two- or Three-Week Period)

- Choose a timeframe that most accurately represents your *average workload* and how you typically spend your time at work. This timeframe can be in the past, or you may opt to do this exercise for a two- or three-week period that's upcoming. If you choose to do this exercise for new and upcoming weeks, follow the criteria above.
- Wherever possible, avoid a timeframe that was unusual (vacation, sick days, personal appointments, training workshops, etc).
- You will want your entire calendar to be blocked as much as possible, to allow for a fulsome analysis of your time is spent -ensure you include blocks for your lunch hour, personal appointments, etc.
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## Step 2: Look for Patterns and Categorize Your Activities

- **Categorize entries into buckets/themes.** There is no right or wrong number of categories. It depends on what type of information you want to organize. They should be specific enough to be useful without being overly specific.
- **Example categories:** Recurring meetings; Project meetings; Emails/Admin Tasks; Lunch; Strategy Work; Team Meeting; Professional Development; Travel time.
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## Step 3: Add Your Categories to Outlook

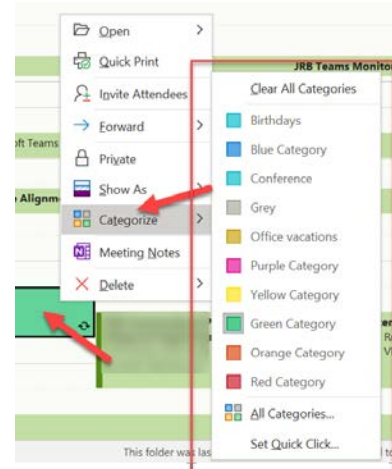
Once you've determined your categories, it's time to add them into Outlook!

1. Open Outlook;
2. Go to the Calendar tab;
3. Click *Categorize* on the menu bar;
4. Rename existing categories to your desired label. Assign a specific colour and click *OK*. You can also add new categories to the list.

## Step 4: Categorize Your Events & Capture Changes

1. Right click on your calendar entry;
2. Under *Categorize*, assign the appropriate category from your customized list of categories. Repeat this step as needed on a weekly or daily basis. You can modify your categories any time, or remove a category as needed. *Remember – this system of coding your calendar entries should work for YOU.*

**Capture unexpected changes.** As your day progresses, your scheduled activities may change – meetings end late, urgent matters arise, interruptions, etc. *For this exercise, capturing unscheduled work is also important!* You may also need to edit the timing of each entry throughout the day or at the end of the day to reflect how your day was spent. For example, if you blocked off time to work on a report, but in reality, you had to respond to an urgent matter, your calendar entry should be edited and adjusted.



## Step 5: Review, Repeat, and Reflect

Repeat this step as needed on a weekly or daily basis. You can modify your categories any time, or remove a category as needed.

*Remember – this system of coding your calendar entries should work for YOU.*

What observations can you make about your work week? Are you surprised by the findings? Does your time in each category align with how you would prioritize your work?

If you could make simple changes to your workday, what would they be? What would enable you to work in a healthy way, more efficient, or sustainably that would allow you to flourish?

Take a moment to write down your reflections. Use these questions as guide to help you get started:

- How often were you able to spend your time the way you planned?
- How often did urgent issues demand that you change your schedule?
- Did meetings start and end on time?
- Do you have enough time to move between meetings?
- Were there any meeting practices that you felt hindered or improved the effectiveness and efficiency of the meeting?
- Were you able to take breaks (wellness, medication, etc.)?
- Were you able to eat your lunch at a reasonable time?
- Was your work being interrupted often? If so, by whom? In what manner (phone calls, stopping by, etc.)?
- Were there any practices that you found helpful in reducing unnecessary interruptions (e.g. Do Not Disturb setting, closing your door, office hours, etc.)

## Next Step: Calendar Audit

Now the fun begins! [Click here to learn how to audit your calendar](#), and assess your findings. You'll also find tips to support your next steps – simple, actionable steps to make positive transformative changes to your work week.